ornamentation could occur before their codification. Fifteen high-quality plates, a number of tables and musical transcriptions, an appendix of texts and repertory concordances, an appendix of manuscripts cited, an extensive bibliography, and indices of liturgical chants and of names and subjects make this book a valuable resource for scholars of this and other chant repertories.

Among the publications of the Monumenta liturgica beneventana, which include the catalog of manuscripts in Beneventan script begun by Virginia Brown and several monographs devoted to one or a few manuscripts, Nardini’s book is the first with a chiefly musical focus and with a scope so broad that it covers an entire repertory of chant in all six genres of Gregorian Mass Propers, in the southern Italian region as a whole, with evidence from over eighty manuscripts. As such, *Interlacing Traditions* joins Thomas Forrest Kelly’s *The Beneventan Chant* and *The Exultet in Southern Italy*, and the *Beneventanum troporum corpus* collection edited by Alejandro Planchart and John Boe, as an essential book-length text for the study of the liturgical music of medieval southern Italy.¹

BIBIANA VERGINE


Ruth DeFord’s “*Tactus, Mensuration, and Rhythm in Renaissance Music* is the latest and most comprehensive in a series of books that seek to describe the proper understanding of mensural notation.¹ Although the title’s key terms suggest a range of topics encompassing music making, composition, analysis, speculative thought, and philosophies of time, DeFord focuses primarily, and reasonably, on practical matters— theories of temporal organization and concerns that inform the performance and analysis of Renaissance music. Still, more abstract questions enter the discussions, granting the book a place alongside recent scholarship that addresses rhythm and meter


more generally. Throughout this erudite study DeFord displays a control of the often contradictory theoretical literature that few can claim. She synthesizes where possible while doing justice to the variety of surviving evidence. This is a hard needle to thread; DeFord does so masterfully.

Passages quoted from theoretical texts are elegantly laid out, with the original text and an English translation side by side. Musical examples are presented using original mensural symbols. This means, for example, that dots are used only when Renaissance notation requires them and not after every ternary note. Although some readers may initially find this approach frustrating, the voices are vertically aligned in score format, which clarifies note durations. Since DeFord’s arguments often depend on the very elements that are true of mensural but not of modern notation, presenting musical examples in “fully” modern notation would have obscured them.

The book is divided into two parts, titled “Theory” and “Practice.” Nonetheless, the boundary between the two parts is permeable and mainly reflects the type of evidence at work. Chapters in Part 1 are organized by topic and supported by evidence from theoretical writings. Chapters in Part 2 constitute a series of case studies delineated by composer and genre (e.g., Du Fay’s songs, Isaac’s Choralis Constantinus, the madrigals of Rore). Theoretical concerns, which provide the explicit organization of the first half, reemerge in the second. The book displays an impulse toward taxonomy, with chapters organized by piece, meter, or occasionally geography. Although this categorization can be useful, section headings do not always signal what is most important about the material that follows. This concern extends to chapter titles too. Chapters built around case studies will draw the attention of scholars already interested in or familiar with the given repertory, but DeFord does not explicitly flag the theoretical issues engaged by those case studies, which would benefit those who do not read the book cover to cover. Even within chapters, the absence of introductions often leaves lingering questions concerning the thrust of the argument.

Chapter 1 provides a useful survey of theoretical sources that address the book’s principal topics. DeFord contextualizes each theorist’s contributions without attempting to pigeonhole them or force them into a unifying narrative. Chapter 2 summarizes the principles of mensural notation, including note shapes, ligatures, dots, imperfection and alteration, and coloration, as well as more advanced topics such as proportions and verbal canons, syncopation, and the relationship between mensuration and rhythm. Though it begins with the basics, this chapter is more detailed than one would expect

in an introduction to mensural notation; it delves into issues (such as syncopation) that are best understood with a baseline of knowledge about the mensural system.

The book’s most important intervention may well be its rethinking of *tactus*, which occupies the remaining chapters in Part 1. For DeFord *tactus* is the primary window onto the challenges of mensural notation; in her analysis *tactus* becomes the central concept that ties together rhythm, notation, performance, and musical time.

In Chapter 3 she identifies six aspects of temporal measurement, all related to each other through the notion of *tactus*. She then distills these concepts into three categories for which she develops specialized terms: performance *tactus*, compositional *tactus*, and theoretical *tactus*. The performance *tactus* is the time unit beaten in performance. The compositional *tactus* is the reference point for contrapuntal considerations, above all dissonance treatment. The theoretical *tactus* is “the time unit traditionally associated with a mensuration sign in music theory” (p. 6). This last category seems to exist mainly because theorists sometimes ascribed *tactus* to a value associated with neither performance nor dissonance treatment—for example, a breve *tactus* in C music, where both the performance and compositional *tactus* are usually the semibreve.3

Subsequent chapters put these terms into action, relating the different aspects of *tactus* to rhythm (Chapter 4), notation (primarily mensuration signs; Chapters 5 and 6), and tempo (Chapter 7). In the chapter on rhythm DeFord describes the role the compositional *tactus* plays in regulating dissonance treatment and explains the relationship between compositional and performance *tactus*. Although these are usually the same note value, DeFord gives guidelines for when one might select a different performance *tactus*—for example, to bring out elements of surface rhythm—and discusses the potential musical consequences. In Chapters 5 and 6, building on the work of Anna Maria Busse Berger, DeFord uses *tactus* as the guiding concept in navigating the paradoxical writings on mensuration from the mid-fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries.4

Chapter 7, the final chapter in Part 1, serves as a pivot between theoretical and practical concerns. It engages some of the most controversial issues in modern scholarship—above all, tempo relationships between music notated under different mensuration signs. The questions at the heart of this chapter concern the extent to which theoretical accounts speak to contemporary practice. DeFord does not attempt to resolve these matters definitively, but rather shows that they were at least as contested in their own day as they have been for the last few decades. Indeed she notes that “there is no

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3. I thank Jeffrey Dean for the use of his elegant mensuration font in this review, which DeFord also uses in her book.
evidence that most theorists conceived the mensural system as a rigorously consistent package in which relationships among signs were the same under all circumstances. . . . The fact that theorists with speculative ambitions were the only ones to address the matter implies that practical options were more varied” (p. 187). This is a far cry from earlier scholarship that suggested a single tempo—or perhaps two—governed all Renaissance music.5 Especially in such a meticulous study, DeFord’s conclusion that variety in terms of tempo was the norm should give pause to anyone purporting to identify the correct tempo relationship between mensuration signs.

Part 2 begins with a case study of mensural practice in Du Fay’s songs. Compelling though DeFord’s discussion is, an introduction identifying what this and the other case studies of mensural complexity are intended to illustrate would have been useful. For some of these studies, such as those of the L’homme armé masses and Isaac’s Choralis Constantinus, the relevance to the book’s aims is obvious; in other cases, such as the studies of Josquin’s five- and six-voice motets, the rewards are less immediately apparent. DeFord generally proceeds by describing a piece’s structure and mensuration and then discussing the various types of tactus and rhythm it engages. Sometimes this means putting the theoretical work of Part 1 into action, but one quickly understands the limitation of using theoretical evidence to interpret these complex cases. Variations on the phrase “there is no theoretical basis for this interpretation” appear several times. This circumstance reflects a pervasive tension between theoretical and musical evidence, which DeFord reconciles in convincing ways. She is always clear about when she is offering her own musical judgment rather than an interpretation that stems directly from the writings of theorists. Indeed her reclaiming of musical judgment, informed by the kind of broad theoretical understanding exemplified by her research, is a refreshing turn.

DeFord often handles dilemmas posed by contradictory evidence by proposing a middle ground between two extremes. An example is the Agnus Dei III of Josquin’s Missa L’homme armé sexti toni, where the cantus-firmus-bearing tenor and bassus are notated under O, while the upper voices are cast in O2 (often interpreted as the perfect minor modus equivalent of C). Which sign should be understood as determining the tempo? According to DeFord’s judgment, following a tempo usually associated with O renders the upper voices too fast; but if the voices cast in O2 proceed at a tempo used for sections under C elsewhere in the mass, the music plods. She suggests taking a tempo that falls between these two extremes.

A similar—and much-debated—conundrum arises in Ockeghem’s Missa L’homme armé. When C governs the tenor alone (as in the Kyrie I), it implies the slower speed associated with an augmented tenor; but in the Christe and Et resurrexit, where all four voices are signed C, should the tenor double in

5. Apel, Notation of Polyphonic Music, 191; Bank, Tactus, Tempo, and Notation, 259.
speed relative to the Kyrie I, or should the other voices match the tenor’s slower tempo? DeFord acknowledges that, with all voices signed ĸ, the compositional tactus falls on the perfect semibreve (implying an integral understanding of ĸ), but does not go so far as to translate that into a fast performance tempo. Instead she takes a similar moderating approach, proposing that the perfect semibreve tactus of ĸ be beaten at half the tempo of O (O \( \infty \infty = \frac{1}{2} \) \( \infty \infty \)). While this solution avoids extremes of tempo, it begs the question, What would it take for us to believe that a passage was meant to go fast?

Chapter 11 builds on an earlier publication by DeFord in which she argues that aspects of the famously obscure notation in Heinrich Isaac’s Choralis Constantinus stem not from Isaac himself but from the music theorist Sebald Heyden. These compositions are puzzling both because they are unlike anything else Isaac wrote and because their simple rhythms do not require this degree of notational complexity. The Choralis Constantinus was not published in full until the 1550s, more than three decades after Isaac’s death, although portions appear earlier in theoretical treatises, including Heyden’s. In this light, DeFord argues that the published Choralis Constantinus should be seen as an example of early reception history, rather than an extreme version of normative mensural practice. This example cautions against placing too much stock in individual notational details without also considering a work’s sources and transmission.

Whereas DeFord’s case studies of fifteenth-century repertories focus on issues arising directly from notation, those devoted to Palestrina and Rore foreground the importance of text in composers’ understanding of mensuration and rhythm. As rhythmic organization at levels larger than the semibreve played an ever smaller role, composers allowed musical rhythm to follow more closely the rhythm of the text. In Chapter 12, DeFord uses Palestrina’s two L’homme armé masses and his Missa Benedicta es to compare his rhythmic style with that of Josquin, since the music of these two composers has driven narratives about the development of Renaissance rhythm. With respect to Palestrina’s five-voice L’homme armé mass, which is indebted to Josquin in terms of its notation, DeFord focuses on the consequences of different modern editorial approaches. The chapter on the note nere madrigals of Rore provides a welcome complement to more common narratives about word painting in the Italian madrigal. DeFord frames the conflict Rore often sets up between ĸ and ₣ as a generative force that shapes the music’s character. She contends that the differences in tactus level implied by these signs allowed for a richer rhythmic palette than ĸ alone. Mensuration all but disappears from the discussion.

in the fourteenth and final chapter of the book, which focuses on popular songs and dances, as the focus sensibly shifts to the musical consequences of text-driven rhythm.

An underlying question for DeFord—and one that shapes this book—is whether theorists always meant what they said. Do their writings provide reliable information about music as it was composed and sung, or can some statements be “explained away” as speculative—that is, as concerned with symmetry and intellectual consistency rather than practice? Unsurprisingly, the answer is different for different theorists. With its broad range of topics, this book opens the door to more explicit discussions of the relationship between theoretical and practical evidence, and the way in which the materials of the first and second halves of this book might relate to one another. In this way, DeFord’s study has already rightly assumed its place as essential reading for anyone interested in Renaissance music.

EMILY ZAZULIA


Nancy Yunhwa Rao’s monograph Chinatown Opera Theater in North America offers a striking new account of opera in 1920s North America. Her contribution is to set aside conventional cultural and geographical ties to continental Europe, drawing instead on the traces of a trans-Pacific network characterized by the flows of Chinese performers and audiences, the associated intangible and material culture of opera performance, and the structural impacts of migrant life and its key impediments—racism, exclusion, and commercial rivalry. Rao’s primary topic is the genre of Cantonese opera, which she explores through archival study and musical and social analysis. Such a project is significant in historical terms, not to mention time-ly, in light of the antipathy that the United States is currently expressing toward its nonwhite populations. As Rao notes, Chinese migrants inhabited a “constant state of not being seen” by the dominant Euro-American settler population (p. 8). The recuperation of their expressive history, then, has the potential to pay respectful witness to their presence and legitimacy in North America while providing an expanded set of perspectives on the continent’s musical history more generally.

Producing such a history is by no means simple. Rao is aware of the ironies of turning to documents that were developed and retained by wary government surveillance agents in assembling her own account, and she seeks too to write back against stereotypes established by early English-language writing about America’s Chinatown theaters. Her approach is to utilize Chinese-language sources on performance practice and theater